

4600 Dixie Hill Road
Fairfax, VA 22030

Ms. Kimberly Topper
Food and Drug Administration, CDER
Advisors and Consultants Staff, HFD-21
5600 Fishers Lane
Rockville, MD 20857

Dear Ms. Topper,

I have been given your name as someone to contact in regards to the upcoming congressional hearings regarding the medication commonly referred to as Oxycontin. I am acutely interested in these hearings, as my mother has had a prescription for Oxycontin since November of 2000 that has literally allowed her to regain her life. I have therefore followed the issue with quite some interest. I am sure you know well the details of this issue, so I will spare you. Allow me instead to elaborate on the case of my mom, a situation that is representative of many who use Oxycontin, and state why the medication should not be banned.

My mom has had osteoporosis pretty bad for many years. This condition weakened her sternum, which was broken during a chiropractic adjustment. The result was nothing short of tragic for her. I remember getting a call at school from my dad to let me know of the injury. Back then, everybody thought she would be healed before the end of summer. But due to the osteoporosis, the injury lingered to this day. Recent X-rays of my mom's sternum show that it is still not completely healed.

My mom's life basically went on hold the spring she was injured. She was ready to graduate George Mason University, and somehow she found the strength to not only petition the school for extensions on her classes, but to also actually finish all the coursework by the end of summer. She attended her graduation ceremony that spring in a wheelchair; the effort of simply sitting in the chair for three hours that Sunday resulted in her being bedridden for the rest of the week. And that is how my mom's life was from then on. She had to seriously prioritize what she had to do and wanted to do, because even the smallest physical effort on her part would irritate the injury and result in her being bedridden for days, sometimes more than a week, afterward. She began classifying her days as either "good" or "bad." Good days were days when she could do something as simple as make it up to my dad's office to eat lunch with him, or even just shower and sit with the family at dinner. Those days were few and far between. She kept trying to increase the number of good days over bad days; maybe she thought she could will herself into healing. My mom is a strong willed individual, but she too has her limits. The hardest part for me of this whole ordeal was watching my mom's will fade.

I was attending school in Williamsburg during this time, and therefore was not faced with my mom's pain day in and day out. But I was amazed at how instead of getting better, she seemed to get worse. It became difficult for me to come home or call, because I would be faced with my mom. When her will finally started going the fall after she was injured, she became progressively more embittered, and it would often come out unpredictably. I love my mom, and I know she is kind, and the absolute last thing she would do is abuse her loved ones. But she often was very mean to my dad, my brother, and I. It got so bad that my girlfriend of two and a half years at that time, who had been good friends with my mom, was averse to coming to my house because of my mom's unpredictable moods. The medications she was on at the time seemed to exacerbate the situation. They certainly did nothing for her mental state: I noticed she was often very disoriented and would not be able to remember things that I had told her not two minutes earlier. People at my dad's office noticed this too; they told me when she would come around, often she appeared to be very disoriented, and was sometimes unable to remember who they were. These were people who my mom had met at least a dozen times previous. They were worried about her being able to drive. At the time she was taking three or four pain medications many times a day, and even all together, they had little effect on her pain. One doctor prescribed a powerful medication for her called Altram. This was the scariest medication to me because it severely handicapped her memory and thinking. She was not able to remember anything from minute to minute. Remember that during this time, she still was bedridden the majority of her days, often going for a week without having the strength to even shower.

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The change in my mom after beginning Oxycontin was quite sudden and marked. Within two weeks of starting the medication, it was almost as if she was never injured at all. She simply got out of bed and hasn't been bedridden but for extremely rare days ever since. I am not exaggerating this fact. I could hardly believe it myself. When I saw her, she looked healthy again, her color had returned and there was a lively tone in her voice that hadn't been there for a long time. I'm not saying things are perfect, my mom still has to be careful what she does as strenuous upper body activity still will put her down in bed for the day afterward, but they are immeasurably better.

I said that I have been following this issue. I know that Oxycontin is being used to get a high similar to that of heroin. But it is necessary to crush the pill up and snort the powder or cook it and inject it, much like heroin. I point out that these are both improper ways of taking any medication, and that if taken properly, people feel nothing. I also point out that Ritalin, which is a widely used and accepted medication, can also be crushed up and snorted to get high. I have known both people who use Ritalin in this way and people who have sold their prescriptions to others so they could get high. I don't know anyone who abuses Oxycontin. Either way, the FDA did not see fit to ban Ritalin in a similar situation. Finally, during the hearings, everyone making a decision whether or not Oxycontin should be banned should ask herself or himself this question. Does preventing the abuse of a medication justify condemning those like my mom, who need it in order to have even a below average quality of life, to further suffering? Banning Oxycontin would do just that to my mom; she has tried pretty much every anti-inflammatory and pain medication available, and nothing has worked significantly except for Oxycontin. I know this is a long letter, but thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David B.C. Nees', with a stylized, flowing script.

David B.C. Nees